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LETTER DATED 13 FEBRUARY 1991 FROM THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND TO THE UNITED NATIONS ADDRESSED TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL

Further to my letter of 28 January (S/22156) I have the honour to communicate to you a further report on operations in the Gulf pursuant to paragraph 2 of resolution 678 (1990).

Air action has continued against military targets. Initially, British forces' air operations concentrated on attacks on airfields and on elements of the Iraqi air defence system. In the second phase, attacks were on bridges vital to the military supply effort to and from Kuwait. In the third phase, the Royal Air Force has attacked surface-to-air missile sites, artillery positions, ammunition storage and Silkworm surface-to-surface missile sites.

Attacks have been directed exclusively at military objectives, using precision weapons wherever possible, particularly in areas where there may be civilians near the targets. All targets are carefully selected because they pose a threat to coalition forces or because they support Iraq's illegal occupation of Kuwait. Pilots have clear instructions to minimize civilian casualties and to avoid damage to sites of religious and cultural significance. Indeed, on a number of occasions, attacks have not been pressed home because pilots were not completely satisfied they could meet these conditions. Latest reports suggest that the Government of Iraq is transferring military headquarters into buildings such as schools, precisely to take advantage of allied care and concern to avoid attacking areas housing civilians.

Indpendent reports from journalists coming from Iraq confirm that allied attacks in general have been remarkably accurate and have also confirmed that Iraqi propaganda is presenting military casualties as civilian. In the case of the attack on the An Nasiriyah bridge on 8 February, Baghdad Radio claimed 47 civilian casualties, but a Western journalist who was an eye witness reported that the bulk of the casualties were military.

The approach of the allies is in contrast to that adopted by the Government of Iraq, which has had no compunction about launching indiscriminate missile attacks

directed at civilians and using environmental damage as a further weapon by deliberately releasing oil into the Gulf. In connection with the release of oil, the British Government has contributed to coping with the effects and helping to prevent an environmental disaster. We have airlifted ninety tons of pollution control equipment to Saudi Arabia and sent oil pollution experts from the Department of Transport to help with expert advice. The Natural Environment Research Council has produced an urgent report on wildlife biological impact which has been made available to the Saudi Arabian authorities. In addition, the Royal Society for the Protection of Animals, which has unique experience in coping with the impact of oil on wildlife, has sent a three-man team to instruct Saudi Arabian volunteers in the techniques of cleaning and rescuing oil-contaminated birds.

The British Government has taken up an offer from the Government of Kuwait to provide volunteer civilians to serve in the Gulf in support of British forces. Up to 70 personnel are to be employed as interpreters and liaison officers in hospitals and in prisoner-of-war (POW) camps. The deployed personnel will have the status of honorary officers in the Kuwaiti army, under the operational control of the Commander, British Forces Middle East. The first group of Kuwaiti personnel was deployed to the Gulf on 7 February.

The British Government has notified the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) of 10 missing British airmen believed to be POWs in Iraqi hands. As yet, no notification as to their capture and whereabouts have been received by ICRC. As stated in my letter of 21 January, the British Government is complying scrupulously with its obligations under the Geneva Conventions and has given ICRC full and immediate access to Iraqi POWs and civilian detainees both in the United Kingdom and in the Gulf theatre. We look to see Iraq act similarly in keeping with its international humanitarian obligations.

We note statements made by the Iraqi Government as regards the conditions under which ICRC access would be granted to allied POWs. My authorities consider it a breach of Iraq's obligations under the Geneva Conventions that it is attempting to create extraneous linkages rather than simply comply with its legal obligations under the Conventions as the United Kingdom is doing.

I should be grateful if this letter could be circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) D. A. H. HANNAY